



Montgomery plans to make \$1.4 million off speed camera late fees

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Montgomery County is making more than a \$1 million a year from fees for drivers who don't pay their speed camera tickets on time.

The county estimates it will collect \$1.1 million in late fees this fiscal year, 256 percent more than \$309,000 it originally budgeted. Drivers dinged with a \$40 speed camera ticket have 30 days to pay or contest the ticket before being charged a \$25 late fee.

If they don't pay the late fee, the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration may flag the driver's vehicle registration. To release the flag, drivers have to pay \$50, with \$20 going directly to the county. The county is planning to make more than \$270,560 off flagging fees alone, bringing the total amount it expects to make off speed camera late payments to almost \$1.4 million.

County budget staffer Edmond Piesen said he was puzzled about why the number of late fees exceeded expectation and didn't know why such a large group of drivers weren't paying their tickets on time.

AAA Mid-Atlantic spokesman John Townsend said the county's relatively low \$40 camera fine -- other jurisdictions around the country charge upwards of \$400 for speed camera tickets -- means that many drivers might not be placing a high premium on paying the ticket on time.

"It's not because of the economy, it's not because of a wanton disregard for the ticket," Townsend said.

He added that the county may have "inadvertently found another pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" with its late-fee revenues.

Critics have long charged that the county's speed camera program is a "cash cow" and an unfair tax on drivers that does little to promote safe driving. Supporters say county data proves that the speed cameras are causing drivers to slow down to safer speeds.

The county's finances took a hit last year when the General Assembly passed a statewide speed camera law that limited the use of speed cameras in school zones and increased the cushion given to drivers before a ticket is issued from 11 miles an hour over the speed limit to 12.

Those changes cost the county an estimated \$13 million in revenues.

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